



San Juan Soil and Water
Conservation District

NEWS RELEASE

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New Mexico Environment Department, New Mexico State Forestry Division & San Juan Soil and Water Conservation District Announce River Planning Project for the Animas River

*State Approves \$287,540 for Lower Animas Watershed-Based Planning through
New Mexico Severance Tax Bond Capital Outlay Funds.*

Aztec, NM – New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary-Designate Ryan Flynn, Energy Minerals & Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) Secretary David Martin, and New Mexico State Forester Tony Delfin announced today approval of \$287,540 to go towards watershed-based planning at the Animas River.

“We are pleased that these public funds will go towards such a worthwhile project,” said Environment Secretary-Designate Ryan Flynn. “The San Juan Soil and Water Conservation District has stepped up and will be excellent river stewards of these public funds.”

“This kind of restoration work is essential for healthy forests, which is an important mission of EMNRD’s State Forestry Division,” said Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department Secretary David Martin. “I commend the collaboration between our state agencies and divisions to get this funding to a worthwhile project.”

The Lower Animas Watershed Based Plan Project will incorporate a large amount of water quality data to characterize nutrient impairment on the Animas River in New Mexico. The goal is to relate water quality data to land use and pollutant sources, to identify the best management practices that will best address these sources, and to create a strategic plan that managers can use to move forward with implementation. This work complements other District successes, including ongoing projects to implement non-point source controls of pollution, a Microbial Source Tracking Study to identify animal species associated with fecal contamination found in the rivers, and control of invasive plant species.

Community leaders call the announcement a major step forward in critical river restoration work. According to Melissa May of the District, “People have been concerned about the water

quality on the Animas River for over ten years, but what's been missing is a systematic plan to identify and fix its problems. This funding allows just that. We're thrilled to bring together years of studies to create a comprehensive watershed plan that our community can use to make real improvements to water quality and the overall health of the Animas River."

According to David Tomko, San Juan Watershed Group Coordinator, this project will complement the Microbial Source Tracking study that the San Juan Watershed Group and the District are conducting, thanks to funding from BHP Billiton's New Mexico Coal Company. This effort is a partnership with the Animas Watershed Partnership and Southern Ute Indian Tribe to address issues across state border. These studies identify and prioritize sources of fecal material and nutrients to the Animas River.

Warren Rider from BHP Billiton said, "BHP Billiton is excited to see this continued support for watershed health in the Lower Animas River basin. The proposed work will complement many efforts, past and present, to understand and improve the health of this river. BHP Billiton prides itself on being a responsible member of the communities in which we operate, always with an overriding commitment to Safety, Health, Environment and Community. We look forward to continuing our support for this important project."

Governor Susana Martinez is calling on state legislators to approve the addition of \$1.5 million in capital outlay funds to address vital river restoration projects across New Mexico through the Governor's River Stewards Initiative. Governor Martinez announced her plan to protect the health of rivers and watersheds through the New Mexico River Stewards Initiative in August 2013.

The project budget is \$287,540 and is being funded by New Mexico Severance Tax Bond Capital Outlay funds. The funding was made available through an agreement reached between the New Mexico Environment Department and the Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department. The project will be implemented with the technical oversight and guidance of NMED's Surface Water Quality Bureau and the State Forestry Division.

New Mexico State Forester Tony Delfin said, "Watershed protection is vital especially because of the ongoing threat of wildfires in New Mexico. The New Mexico State Forestry Division is committed to any project that will lead to healthy forests. We're pleased to be involved in this project."

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